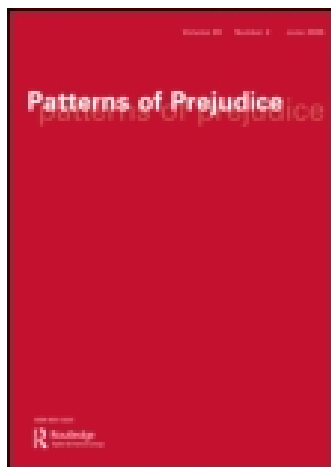


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N. Copsey

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NIGEL COPSEY

John Amery: the antisemitism of the 'perfect English gentleman'¹

ABSTRACT Copsey explores the antisemitism of John Amery, the fascist renegade who along with William Joyce was hanged for treason after the Second World War.

Like Joyce, Amery was a radio propagandist who made a series of war-time broadcasts from Berlin. Beyond this, he also tried to enlist British POWs to fight against the Soviets on the Eastern Front. Amery was the son of a senior British cabinet minister and yet, compared with Joyce, he has received little serious attention. What has been written about Amery tends to denude him of any ideological sophistication and presents him as a rather farcical figure, an irresponsible and foolhardy adventurer who was motivated by a simple fear of Communism. Copsey departs significantly from these standard representations and, using Amery's radio broadcasts and much-neglected propagandistic writings, shows the extent to which antisemitism became Amery's core obsession. Attentive to the ways in which an upper-class background influenced Amery's thinking, Copsey delineates the contours of his virulent antisemitism. What this article reveals is that, beneath the surface charm of the 'perfect English gentleman', Amery's hatred of Jews was deeply rooted in conspiracy theory and racial ideology. Despite all this, one cannot escape the curious fact that Amery's father was half-Jewish. On this point, Copsey examines whether Amery's passionate antisemitism was also psychologically driven.

KEYWORDS *anti-Communism, antisemitism, conspiracy theory, John Amery, treason*

Of the two fascist radio broadcasters convicted of treason and executed at the end of the Second World War, the most infamous is without doubt William Joyce. More commonly and comically known as 'Lord Haw-Haw', Joyce commands all the notoriety and has attracted the lion's share of scholarly interest.² In Joyce's shadow is John Amery (1912–45), a greatly forgotten

1 I would like to convey thanks to my colleague Graham Ford for his valuable comments on an early draft of this article.

2 See, for instance, J. A. Cole, *Lord Haw-Haw. The Full Story of William Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber 1987), Francis Selwyn, *Hitler's Englishman. The Crime of Lord Haw-Haw* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1987) and, more recently, M. A. Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda: Lord Haw-Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000).

character who, in December 1945 at the age of thirty-three, was hanged for treason just five days before Joyce went to the gallows. Benito Mussolini's mistress Claretta Pettaci once thought Amery 'the perfect English gentleman',³ and elsewhere he has been described as an 'extraordinary individual' who was 'frail, intelligent and typically English'.⁴ The same description could never be applied to William Joyce with any accuracy: 'Haw-Haw' was not even a British subject.⁵

Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to John Amery despite the fact that, as the eldest son of Leopold S. Amery—a very senior British politician and Secretary of State for India in Churchill's war-time government—he came from an elite family and was, at the time, a household name. Indeed, at first, German propagandists regarded him as a 'real catch'.⁶ For a time, as one observer has written, Amery 'was the most petted and best advertised English propagandist that had ever been put on German radio'.⁷ Accordingly, it was Amery who was accommodated in style in Berlin's Kaiserhof hotel while Joyce had to make do with a suburban flat. Nonetheless, as it turned out, Amery's broadcasting career in Berlin was relatively brief. The main spell lasted no more than two months at the end of 1942 before Amery left for Paris and his thoughts turned towards enlisting a legion of renegade British POWs prepared to fight the Soviets on the Eastern Front. Though Amery's endeavours with his renegade British Legion of St George proved abortive, they were not entirely unproductive. One outcome was his book, *England Faces Europe*, published in 1943, which, even though it sets out Amery's political beliefs, has failed to attract any serious study.⁸

What is more, it has only recently emerged that Amery's father was 'part-Jewish'.⁹ This matter demands further investigation and scrutiny since it soon becomes apparent that Leo Amery thoroughly failed to deal with the centrality of his son's antisemitism. Instead, his father and indeed his brother Julian—the former Conservative MP¹⁰—always endeavoured to explain John Amery's actions in terms of a general 'obsession with the Communist dan-

3 According to E. R. Fields's introduction to J. Amery, *England and Europe* (Marietta, GA 1994), a reprint of Amery's original version of *England and Europe* (Paris 1943).

4 By Reinhard Spitzzy, a German counter-intelligence officer who met Amery while travelling to Paris by train in 1942: see R. Spitzzy, *How We Squandered the Reich*, trans. from the German by G. T. Waddington (Wilby, Norfolk: Michael Russel 1997), 353.

5 William Joyce was born in the United States but had fraudulently obtained a British passport.

6 Spitzzy, 353.

7 Rebecca West, *The Meaning of Treason* (London: Macmillan 1952), 129.

8 This is once again in evidence in the most recently published study of John Amery; see Adrian Weale, *Patriot Traitors. Roger Casement, John Amery and the Real Meaning of Treason* (London: Viking 2001), 190: 'A detailed analysis of the text of *England Faces Europe*, published in Berlin in July 1943, is unnecessary: it is an unedifying read, consisting of crude anti-Semitic insults dressed up in the high-flown phrases of a semi-educated waster attempting to sound like a serious political commentator.'

9 See W. D. Rubinstein, 'The secret of Leopold Amery', *History Today*, February 1999, 17–23.

10 Julian Amery served as an operative in the SOE during the Second World War. He was elected Conservative MP for Preston North (1950–66) and then for Brighton Pavilion from 1969.

ger',¹¹ although the end result of those actions was, of course, a source of acute embarrassment for his family. Regrettably, their generous treatment is echoed elsewhere. According to Rebecca West: 'Though Amery's speeches held a few drops of anti-Semitic poison, his real preoccupation was hatred of Russia and communism.'¹² Francis Selywn agrees that Amery's 'single obsession' was his anti-Communism.¹³ But this evaluation is open to a severe critique. It is clear from Amery's radio broadcasts, and especially from his much-neglected propagandistic writings, that John Amery was 'a convinced and vicious antisemite', as W. D. Rubinstein has fittingly described him.¹⁴

The journey to Berlin

At first sight, Amery does appear to be a far less significant figure than William Joyce, and is often dismissed as intellectually unsophisticated and a minor propagandist. Indeed, as the 'problem child' of well-known parents, Amery had a reputation as a reckless and politically naive adventurer who was drawn into a vortex of political events that overwhelmed him. Joyce on the other hand was the dedicated fascist: in the 1920s he had been an early recruit to the British Fascists; after 1932 a key figure in Mosley's British Union of Fascists; and, from 1937, leader of a BUF offshoot, the National Socialist League. Joyce also possessed a passion for street fighting; a facial scar from the ear to the mouth on the right-hand side of his face bore testimony to one particularly vicious brawl with an opponent. Quite the opposite was true of Amery. As West puts it: 'Amery was a gentleman . . . born on the imperial side of the River Thames.'¹⁵ There was no obvious contact between Amery and British fascist organizations in the 1930s, and to suggest that Amery was in some way converted by 'native' fascism would be wide of the mark. But this does not mean to say that native antisemitism can be so easily dismissed. Here one can do no more than speculate, but there remains a possibility that native antisemitism—distinct from British fascism—left an impression on Amery.

Of course it would be wrong to exaggerate the extent of antisemitism in British society in the 1930s. On the other hand, it would be naive to propose that it played no part in British life at all. In certain working-class areas of Britain, such as the East End of London, antisemitism could take violent forms, although it never reached the magnitude of its continental European counterpart. As for the British upper and upper middle classes, antisemitism was more restrained and found expression in tasteless jokes and social ostracism. This is what Richard Griffiths refers to as 'social antisemitism' and, in a wider sense, Griffiths argues that this 'social antisemitism' provided a 'bed-rock' that al-

11 See *John Amery: An Explanation* (LSA 1946), reproduced as an appendix in Leo Amery, *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929–1945*, ed. J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (London: Hutchinson 1988), 1071–5.

12 West, 131.

13 Selywn, 125.

14 Rubinstein, 23.

15 West, 129.

lowed more extreme forms of antisemitism to permeate popular consciousness in the 1930s.¹⁶ Even so, violent Jew-baiting—of the type identified with the likes of Joyce and his disciples in the East End—remained altogether more lower class and ‘grubby’. This kind of activity was hardly the done thing for John Amery, the urbane upper-class English gentleman who instead occupied his time by indulging blithely in the sophistication and privilege of London’s West End café society. But, be that as it may, within this exclusive milieu it is probable that Amery came into contact with conscious or unconscious forms of ‘social antisemitism’. If this were the case, a negative imprint on Amery’s early attitudes towards Jews may have been the likely consequence.

If Joyce’s path to Nazi Germany was relatively direct, by contrast Amery’s was twisted and took a continental route. Amery had a penchant for good living and, as a young man, socialized amongst the elite of London café society.¹⁷ These tastes, however, proved costly: Amery was declared bankrupt at the age of only twenty-four. Eager for a new start he left England in 1936 although, from that time up to the outbreak of war in 1939, his exact movements are unclear.¹⁸ The version of events, as his family understood it, was that, driven by anti-Communism, Amery was one of the few Britons to be drawn to the nationalist rather than the republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. For a time, he claimed to have served as a volunteer officer with pro-Franco Italian forces. But, more importantly, he apparently acted as a liaison officer for the French Cagoulaards (Hooded Cloaks), a network of clandestine groups committed to the violent destruction of Communism. What is clear is that, whilst in France, Amery came into contact with the dissident Communist leader Jacques Doriot, head of the Parti populaire français (French Popular Party), a ‘protofascist’ organization that from 1938 onwards became increasingly antisemitic.¹⁹ The impressionable Amery struck up a close friendship with Doriot and travelled extensively with him, including visits to Germany, Italy, Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Doriot almost certainly had a defining influence on Amery’s political beliefs, particularly with regard to reviling Jews as the conspiratorial force behind Communism. However, according to his father, even before his departure for the continent, Amery was predisposed to fascism. Like countless others in his social circle, John Amery was ardently opposed to Communism. Furthermore, since many leading Bolsheviks had been Jewish, a significant section of mainstream Conservative opinion—including such figures as Winston Churchill—had already made a connection between Communism

16 See Richard Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted. Captain Ramsay, the Right Club and English Anti-Semitism* (London: Constable 1998), 11–33.

17 While doing so, he met the actress Una Wing, whom he later married in Athens in 1932.

18 Amery’s passport certainly introduces some doubt as to his exact movements in this period. For instance, it has been claimed that Amery first joined Franco’s forces in March 1937 yet his MI5 personal file (KV2) locates him outside Spain at this time; see Weale, 119.

19 See Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–1939* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 1995), 46–53, 204–79.

and Jewry. For many in this period, Bolshevism and Jewry were synonymous. Amery was most likely aware of this association but his father believes that it was his son's experience of money-lenders and subsequent bankruptcy that were responsible for his antisemitism.²⁰ Yet, as Rubinstein convincingly argues, the traditional association between Jews and usury probably did not feature in Amery's case as 'it is hard to believe that John Amery needed to resort to backstreet money-lenders, let alone become a Nazi supporter as a result, when he had wealthy relatives to turn to. Instead, John Amery's antisemitism appears to have been purely ideological.'²¹

However, Amery's impassioned antisemitism also drew potency from another source: the peculiarities of his own personality. Rubinstein speculates on but does not develop this point by asking whether John Amery's antisemitism was at least partly psychologically driven, a very unusual case of 'Oedipal revolt'.²² In all probability, Amery was aware that his father was a 'half-Jew' despite the fact that Leo Amery always kept his Jewish ancestry a closely guarded secret. Moreover, as the author of the final draft of the Balfour Declaration, the extent of his father's philosemitism and pro-Zionism must have been obvious to his son.

So was John Amery psychologically unstable? Certainly the evidence from a psychiatric assessment of Amery prior to his execution makes for compelling reading. It maintains that Amery had throughout his life exhibited 'all the symptoms of psychopathy of a type which borders on the schizoid (psychotic) character', including childhood neurosis, juvenile delinquency, pathological lying, abnormal sexual behaviour, mild megalomania, a persecution complex and a distinct lack of morality. It records bizarre behavioural patterns. As a child he threw a lighted match into his brother's pram; his headmaster at Harrow recalled that of all the boys he had known 'John Amery was the most abnormal'; he resented discipline and, after absconding, was put under private tutors one of whom he charged with indecent assault; he contracted venereal disease before the age of seventeen, was bi-sexual and practised masochism. As for other 'peculiarities of conduct', Amery had a paranoid phobia of sitting with his back to a door and carried a revolver. At the cinema, he insisted on buying an extra seat for his overcoat, and even carried a teddy bear mascot.²³

All the evidence suggests that Amery had 'psycho-abnormalities'. But was he so troubled that he was prepared to rebel against his father and be at odds with his own part-Jewish origins? It would seem so. His psychiatric assessment identified 'a complete absence of social conscience and total insensitivity to the pain or injury caused to his family and friends by his

20 Soucy, 278.

21 Rubinstein, 23.

22 Ibid.

23 See the psychiatric report on John Amery by Dr Edward Glover, Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 144/22823/224-233.

conduct'.²⁴ But psychological approaches to antisemitic conspiracy theory typically involve consideration of cognitive as well as emotional factors. Michael Billig has previously noted how repressed emotions can be projected on to conspiracy mythology and, in Amery's case, there can be little doubt that this occurred.²⁵ Yet emotions are not in themselves sufficient to explain Amery's antisemitism. Cognitive factors—the way in which Amery made sense of what was happening in the world—must figure prominently. We should have no doubt that Amery passionately believed in what he both voiced and put in writing. So while he was clearly emotionally disturbed, this fact should not take anything away from the sincerity and substance of Amery's political thinking. Moreover, although the relationship with his father was undoubtedly important, this does not imply that all extreme forms of antisemitism can be reduced to psychological failings. Others in British society shared Amery's belief in a Jewish conspiracy—Joyce, N. Webster, A. K. Chesterton, A. H. M. Ramsay for example²⁶—and it would surely be wrong to reduce their intense hatred for Jews to some psychological aberration. Even in Amery's case, as the Home Secretary Chuter Ede reminds us, there was no defect of the intelligence. Emotional instability to one side, Amery was still criminally responsible for his treasonable offences.²⁷

In 1940 Amery returned to France and settled in the Vichy zone with a young female Cagoulard, Jeanine Barde.²⁸ Although he largely desisted from political activity, barbed comments about Vichy's 'reactionary' politics meant that he was regarded with some suspicion by the French authorities and in November 1941 was arrested. However, thanks to the efforts of Barde and Doriot, he was soon released on condition that he remain domiciled in the area around Grenoble. Uninterested in dull provincial life, he embarked on a number of attempts to extricate himself from this tedium. He first sought repatriation on the grounds of ill health (he claimed to have recently suffered from tuberculosis) but his appeal was rejected; he next approached the Italians in order to secure some work in Italy but received no reply. Then, in desperation, he approached the Finns stressing his eagerness to join up with their army in order to do battle against the Soviets. This time he did receive a reply but it was negative. Eventually and unexpectedly, during the summer of 1942, a local German official visited Amery and invited him to Berlin with the intention of discussing employment in propaganda work. Unsurprisingly, Amery seized this chance. Finally, after having secured safe passage, Amery

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See Michael Billig, 'The extreme right: continuities in anti-Semitic conspiracy theory in post-war Europe', in Roger Eatwell and Noël O'Sullivan (eds), *The Nature of the Right* (London: Pinter 1989), 146–66.

²⁶ See Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right. British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933–39* (London: Constable 1980) and *Patriotism Perverted*.

²⁷ See Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 144/22823/319–321.

²⁸ In 1943 Barde was found dead in Amery's room at the Kaiserhof. Spitzzy claims that, after a heavy drinking session, Amery had given Barde a poison pill instead of a headache pill (Spitzzy, 355).

along with Jeanine Barde arrived in the Reich capital and, on 19 November 1942, made the first of seven radio speeches from Berlin.

John Amery speaks

It is indicative of the central part that antisemitism occupied in his political beliefs that Jews came under attack in all seven talks.²⁹ In the opening broadcast, Amery immediately called into question the 'patriotism' of Jews, a standard insinuation of antisemites over the years. He urged listeners to have no faith in the British media:

There is not one, not one single great daily newspaper in London that is not Jewish controlled, not one news reel, it's so easy to check it at Somerset House. You are being lied to, your patriotism, your love for our England is being exploited by people who for the most part hardly have the right to pretend to be English.³⁰

Worse still, as part of a global conspiracy of international Jewish financiers that had pressed Neville Chamberlain into war, Amery insisted that this abuse of patriotism was criminal. The 'real traitors' were the Jews, not Amery and not the great British public: 'The public, the free Englishman, did not declare the war, but a disheartened old gentleman, pressed from all sides by the men who wanted this, the Jews.'³¹ That the Jews were responsible for the war had been a consistent theme of Nazi radio propaganda since the outbreak of hostilities and, in Amery's opinion, the responsibility of 'financial Jewry' for the declaration of war was instantly recognizable:

In September 1939 the only people who had any real interest in, or serious reason for attacking Germany were precisely these international trusts who, we find, at that time virtually controlled the Governments of Paris, Washington and Moscow, and were able to bring such pressures on Mr Chamberlain as to force him to declare war.³²

For those listeners mystified by how Jewish finance could control Communist Moscow, Amery pointed the finger at the Jewish New York bankers Kuhn, Loeb and Co. who, consistent with the speculative talk of many other conspiracy theorists (including William Joyce), 'financed and made possible with their enormous resources the success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia'.³³ What was to be their return from such sponsorship? In common with Hitler and many other antisemites, Amery insisted that Wall Street and the Kremlin were together engaged in a bid for Jewish world domination and

29 The quotations are taken from *John Amery Speaks*, a booklet published in 1943 and circulated to POWs, held in the Imperial War Museum, London (K.78/1880). BBC Monitors later testified that the original transcripts differed only very slightly to *John Amery Speaks*; see Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 144/22822/255.

30 *John Amery Speaks*, 8.

31 *Ibid.*, 39.

32 *Ibid.*, 13.

33 *Ibid.*, 14.

warned that, 'after Germany, by the force of things, our Empire is the only Aryan power that would stand between Jewry and its dreams'.³⁴ Yet, with their alleged appetite for subversive activity, to which he drew attention in his third broadcast, the British, Amery insisted, were in no position to tolerate the Jews:

Don't you see them as the days go by, slowly the stranglehold tightens? Jewish led demonstrators in Trafalgar Square, see them in the cinemas in the West End of London, their hammer and sickle ensigns, how they push you, how they blow out their cigarette smoke in your face.³⁵

Predictably, the opening of the Second Front in North Africa, the subject of Amery's fourth broadcast, was also seen through a conspiratorial lens. For Amery, the Allied landings in North Africa marked 'the beginnings of American and Jewish domination over Africa' with 'Jews of the ghettos of Algiers, of Oran able to embrace the soldiers in the pay of World Jewry'.³⁶ According to Amery, no British advantage was to be gained from this campaign. On the contrary, the Second Front could bring no comfort: 'Betrayed by our Government, undermined by Communism, ours is an uphill fight against all the power of vested Jewish interests'; what will 'make or break us' is 'the extent to which we can justify that we are British, and not mercenaries and degenerate tools of American finance and Judeo-Communism'.³⁷

Unlike the previous broadcasts, the final two talks provide revealing glimpses into Amery's wider racial ideology. In the penultimate talk, broadcast on Christmas Eve 1942, Amery sees the 'Germanic and Anglo-Saxon races' as 'near cousins' and sets them apart in the racial hierarchy as the 'two dominating and allied Nordic races' that would have constituted an unbeatable Nordic bloc capable of having 'frustrated once and for all time, the Jewish and Communist dreams of World Empire'.³⁸ Although Amery stops short of openly labelling Jews as racially subhuman, a racial-anthropological worldview is strongly implied. Menacingly, in his final broadcast, Amery reveals his eliminationist mind-set, declaring that 'the parasitical Jewish intermediary that enriches himself on the brains of the leaders and the work of the masses in equal proportion must once and for all disappear from our social structure'.³⁹

The impact of Amery's broadcasting is impossible to measure with any accuracy although it seems most probable that the broadcasts were of little real consequence. Part of the problem was delivery. Whilst Joyce was widely seen as a skilled broadcaster, one listener described Amery's talks as 'screeching, incoherent rodомontades'.⁴⁰ The evidence we do have—from a single

³⁴ Ibid., 16.

³⁵ Ibid., 20.

³⁶ Ibid., 23.

³⁷ Ibid., 29.

³⁸ Ibid., 31, 33.

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰ See Selwyn, 126.

Home Intelligence Report—suggests public reaction to Amery's first broadcast varied throughout the United Kingdom. Scotland and Northern Ireland generated most comment, the reaction principally being 'sympathy with his father and condemnation of his anti-Jewish sentiments'.⁴¹ However, in other areas, the impact was limited not least because by this time many had stopped listening to German radio broadcasts. A further factor that probably restricted Amery's effectiveness was that other broadcasters, such as Joyce, frequently followed Amery's 'patriotic' talks with decidedly anti-British invective that, as Amery said, involved 'yelling out abuse of my countrymen'.⁴² Indeed, it was this conflict of interest that led Amery, the 'ardent patriot', to return to Paris in January 1943. Here he was reunited with Jacques Doriot who, together with Marcel Déat, leader of the collaborationist Rassemblement national populaire (National Popular Assembly), succeeded in turning Amery's attentions elsewhere.

England and Europe

In a voluntary statement given at an internment camp in Italy in May 1945, Amery recalls that further contact with Déat and Doriot—who had just returned from the Eastern Front on leave from the French Volunteer Legion—convinced him that Europe would soon come under Communist domination.⁴³ At this lowest point, immediately following the German surrender at Stalingrad at the end of January 1943, Amery decided that the only way to avoid Europe being overrun by Bolshevism was for Britain to arrive at a compromise peace with Germany. Improbably, Amery was sure that by creating a British anti-Bolshevik legion, he could convince the British that Europe was uniting against Bolshevism and so 'the problem would be shifted away from "Germany the mad dog of Europe" to, "all collaborating to the common good"'.⁴⁴ The plan was to raise a band of volunteers from POW and internment camps to be divided into small combat units, posted to various parts of the front and photographed surrounded by SS men. This would give the impression that there were hundreds of members of the so-called British Legion of St George, a ruse that Amery thought would set off a new wave of recruitment.⁴⁵ Needless to say there was nothing new in the idea of a national anti-Bolshevik legion. The French, Belgians, Norwegians and the Dutch already had their own versions.

With the German foreign ministry responding enthusiastically to the scheme (a similar plan had already been mooted by the Germans themselves), Amery prepared for his first recruitment drive. As part of this process, propaganda was to be directed at the camps. Accordingly, a proclamation of the

41 Home Intelligence Weekly Report, no. 113, 3 December 1942: Public Record Office, London: PRO INF 1/292/303.

42 Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 45/25773/78.

43 Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 45/25773/76.

44 Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 45/25773/79.

45 Public Record Office, London: PRO HO 45/25773/86.

Legion of St George was drafted and circulated, as were copies of *John Amery Speaks*, a booklet containing the transcripts of his radio broadcasts. In addition, Amery authored a companion volume to *John Amery Speaks*, entitled *England Faces Europe*, intended to be, as Ronald Seth says, 'the political gospel' of the British Legion of St George.⁴⁶ This was, in turn, abridged into booklet form with the slightly different title, *England and Europe*. Significantly Amery's written work expanded on views already expressed in his radio broadcasts and much space is tellingly devoted to the issue of Jewry. That Jews had become his central concern is undeniable.

In this work, dismissed by Seth as a 'farrago of nonsense',⁴⁷ Amery is guided by an antisemitic conspiracy theory that, through the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, is ultimately traced back to the Talmud, 'the supreme directive and code of the Jewish people'.⁴⁸ According to Amery, the British cannot rely on the United States because the men that surround Roosevelt are the very (Jewish) people who financed the Bolshevik Revolution (he singles out Parvus and Warburg as providing the start-up funds for the Comintern).⁴⁹ The trouble with Bolshevism, Amery writes, 'is that it is not specifically Slav but world wide, in the sense that its supporters come from the riff-raff of every class and *creed*, world wide in the sense *that it is Jewish controlled*'.⁵⁰ Amery is in no doubt that the role of 'financial Jewry's' partnership with Bolshevism is to let loose the Asiatic 'horde' from the remote steppes of Soviet Russia and, once supported by 'the mass power of this animalistic group of men, Jewry will retain the thrones, the power, the money and the effective control of the world'.⁵¹ If, Amery warns, we allow ourselves to be 'sandwiched and swallowed up by the association of Judeo-plutocracy in Washington and Judeo-Bolshevism in Moscow', the British empire will be destroyed. Consequently, 'Our victory can only come from an alliance to [*sic*] our natural allies the Germans'.⁵²

What held this Jewish conspiracy theory and pro-Germanism together was Amery's racial ideology ('Germany's war is our war—the war of all Aryan peoples'⁵³), alongside an overwhelming obligation to show Hitler 'an immense gratitude' for being 'the first and greatest man to attack fearlessly the (Jewish) problem at its base'.⁵⁴ For Amery, although 'our racial, moral and natural affinities bring us closer to Germans, than to any other race on earth',⁵⁵ the major obstacle to changing sides was the 'internal colonization' of Britain by

46 Ronald Seth, *Jackals of the Reich. The Story of the British Free Corps* (London: New English Library 1972), 32.

47 Ibid.

48 Amery, *England and Europe*, 17.

49 Ibid., 9–10.

50 Ibid., 9.

51 Ibid., 11.

52 Amery, *England Faces Europe*, 16.

53 Ibid., 96.

54 Ibid., 24.

55 Ibid., 96.

a Jewish plutocracy. Disturbingly, Amery maintains: 'No dictatorship, however brutal, can have the same demoralising, corrupting influence on the public as this colonisation of an extra, anti-national element.'⁵⁶ What is so pernicious about this colonization, apparently, is that it remains unseen: 'When things go well one presents a Jew like DISRAELI, when things are not so good one pulls out of a cupboard some Gentile marionette like ASQUITH . . .'⁵⁷ Amery's solution is the complete eradication of this 'semi-human',⁵⁸ 'extra-national' element from Britain to be effected through the deportation of Jews to their own national state (but not Palestine because that is Arab). Amery, in a bid to reconcile his racial antisemitism with the 'fair-mindedness' and 'generosity' of the archetypal English gentleman, asks 'for no massacres of the Jews; we only ask them to leave, to get out of a country they have prostituted and betrayed'. However, there is still an aggressive undercurrent to his language that is not to be underestimated: 'if they wish to take up the glove, before we will allow England to perish, perish first Judah'.⁵⁹ Given his own ancestry, where in this glittering future would Amery and his father be placed? Reassuringly, there is a proviso: 'If the Jews are once and for all relegated to their homeland, the semi and quarter Jews will, in the space of time, be absorbed by the Aryan races amongst which they have remained.'⁶⁰

Whilst antisemitism unquestionably constituted the core of Amery's political views, *England Faces Europe* also provides us with the outline of a broader fascist programme of a social revolutionary hue. Here, Amery departs from Hitler's Nazism and reveals hints of the 'fascist socialism' of Doriot and Déat. It is distinctly anti-capitalist in tone, with a call for the banning of financial trusts and monopolies, the redistribution of surplus goods, free worker insurance, profit-sharing between owner, shareholder and worker in equal proportion, the national interest to serve as the only point of reference for high finance, no British money to be invested abroad and autarchy within the empire. Through his demands for a 'corporate' House of Commons, representing the British people by their trades and professions, Amery obviously seeks an end to the existing liberal democratic system. He promises a new act that will pursue 'Persons acting in their own interest against the Nation', and provide the means by which the new state could enforce its will.⁶¹ Even so, Amery denied that he was seeking to replace democracy with 'fascism'. As an English patriot, he stressed that he could not support the imposition of a 'foreign' system. Indeed, his sense of English 'fair play' was evident: 'we bow to any other British program or conception on the one condition, that the foreign element is completely eradicated from our political and social structure first.' And the revolution that he intended was not 'a

56 Ibid., 25.

57 Ibid., 25.

58 Ibid., 24.

59 Ibid., 95.

60 Amery, *England and Europe*, 31.

61 See Amery, *England Faces Europe*, 63–73.

rising against one section of Englishmen' but, first and foremost, an anglicized revolution against Jewry: 'we are making a revolution against a foreign, extra-national element that has corrupted and perverted our political machine.'⁶²

Though Amery's propaganda was specifically directed towards canvassing support for his anti-Bolshevik legion, it should also be seen in terms of a wider attempt by the Germans to increase anti-Jewish and anti-Bolshevik sentiment amongst POWs. According to Max Weinreich, twelve different pamphlets were distributed among the 65,000 British POWs in 1943. In 1944 as many as 20,000 copies of the antisemitic pamphlet *How Odd of God* were disseminated. Anti-Jewish and pro-German books were also made available to British prisoners. Given the volume of material, Weinreich believes that this propaganda 'probably did not remain without effect'.⁶³ Nonetheless, its impact should not be overstated. When Amery along with his German escort confidently ventured into the St Denis internment camp near Paris in April 1943, he encountered much opposition and slipped up badly. Very few volunteers came forward (one of the unfortunate few was under the impression that Amery was British Foreign Secretary). With Amery's credibility damaged by such an abject performance, the Waffen SS eventually hijacked the project. The legion was renamed the British Free Corps (BFC): the name change from St George most likely a bid to widen its appeal beyond Englishmen (Amery had always conflated Britain with England). But, all told, no more than thirty to forty renegades were ever recruited and it only ever functioned as a propaganda unit.⁶⁴

Intriguingly, following his arrest in Brussels in September 1944, Roy Courlander, an enlisted member of the BFC, stated that between February and May 1944 Amery's connection with the legion was 'easily severed by pointing out to the SS that he was partly Jewish'.⁶⁵ The implication is that, by this time, Amery's parentage was well known in renegade circles. In spite of this, although kept at a distance from the BFC, Amery was still employed by the Germans. As well as making the occasional radio broadcast, he travelled extensively and delivered public lectures for which he received a hefty salary. If one lecture given by Amery at Rennes in 1944 is anything to go by, his antisemitism remained undiminished. Here he denounced the British government as 'capitalistic, infected and completely influenced by Jews; and he would have nothing to do with a nation led by madmen'.⁶⁶ Following the Allied invasion of Normandy, however, his value to the Germans further depreciated. Consequently, in September 1944, after an invitation from Mussolini to visit him at Lake Garda, Amery gravitated towards northern Italy and, from

62 Amery, *England and Europe*, 30.

63 See Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors. The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People*, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 1999), 213. I am grateful to Professor Colin Holmes for drawing my attention to this source.

64 See Public Record Office, London: PRO KV/2/79/72z and KV/2/81/242a.

65 Public Record Office, London: PRO KV 2/79/72z.

66 Public Record Office, London: PRO KV 2/79/69a.

November 1944 onwards, started to broadcast regularly on Mussolini's radio network. But by this time Amery was playing a desperate game; his situation looked ominous when finally, in April 1945, Italian partisans captured him.

On his return to England, Amery was charged with eight counts of high treason and remanded to Brixton Prison. His trial at the Old Bailey opened on 28 November 1945 but, after he decided to plead guilty, it lasted just eight minutes. The judge then passed sentence: death by hanging. Eleventh-hour attempts were made to save him: Julian Amery visited Spain in a bid to prove evidence of Spanish citizenship but Amery had signed a certificate that he was a British subject in July 1940 in order to claim relief from the British consulate in Nice; Amery's father appealed on the grounds that his son was pathologically insane but the Home Secretary was convinced that Amery knew the consequences of his actions; and twenty-seven people in Birmingham (Leo Amery was Conservative MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook) signed a petition requesting that Amery be reprieved. But to no avail. Albert Pierrepoint, Amery's executioner, later described him as the bravest man that he had ever had to execute. As the noose slipped around his neck, John Amery was said to have light-heartedly remarked: 'I've often wanted to meet you Pierrepoint—although not under these circumstances.'⁶⁷

Amery in the spotlight

Overshadowed by William Joyce, the figure of John Amery has been much neglected. It is surely time to put Amery in the spotlight. A detailed treatment of this fascinating character is long overdue. As a first step, this article has challenged the view put forward by his family and reiterated elsewhere that Amery's misdemeanours can somehow be explained simply in terms of a patriotic, over-zealous anti-Communism. If not a justification for his conduct, this line of reasoning has at least lent Amery a semblance of legitimacy, particularly in a post-war world that was soon divided into two ideologically opposed camps. Accordingly, the 'problem' was not Amery's anti-Communism but the fact that at the finish he found himself, as his father writes, 'on the wrong side of the barricades'.⁶⁸ As Julian Amery later wrote: 'John never did anything against the British—as his efforts were all directed against the Russians. He loathed Communism. Having worked in the Eastern bloc countries during the war, I could see his point.'⁶⁹ Such an explanation, if it is accepted, diminishes the importance of Amery's antisemitism. For Amery was not simply an anti-Communist. All the same, we should not forget that he arrived at his extreme hatred of Jews from a starting position of anti-Communism and that, at first, anti-Communism was clearly his primary concern.

Despite his part-Jewish origins, John Amery became a malicious antisemite. Indeed, here was a fascist traitor who was able simultaneously to

67 E. R. Fields's introduction, Amery, *England and Europe*, 2.

68 Leo Amery, 1075.

69 E. R. Fields's introduction, Amery, *England and Europe*, 2.

reconcile both his own part-Jewish origins and an upper-class Englishness with an extreme form of anti-Jewish prejudice. But Amery's gentility only stretched so far: the violent undertones to his antisemitism should not be ignored. That a fierce antisemitism eventually formed the essence of his political beliefs is unquestionable and, in the end, it was this that drove his anti-Communism (and anti-capitalism). Through careful consideration of the content of both his broadcasts and his written work, there is incontrovertible evidence that John Amery fully believed in Jewish conspiracy theory. Moreover, under Nazi inspiration, it came to be reinforced by a racial-anthropological worldview whereby the British and the Germans were deemed to be superior Nordic races.

Without doubt, what mattered most to Amery was the thought that Jewry was bent on world domination, that it had two masks, that of Roosevelt and that of Stalin. Insidiously disguised, Jews were using both American imperialism and Soviet Communism as twin instruments in a bid to subdue the 'Aryan' nations. What is more, a Jewish plutocratic tyranny was corrupting Britain from within, preventing an Anglo-German alliance and surrendering the empire to Washington and Moscow. Consequently, though late in the day, a national revolution against Jewry was vital so as to completely eradicate this 'foreign' element from Britain's political and social structure. And, despite the fact that Amery—the 'perfect English gentleman'—claimed that he desired no bloodbath, such was his abhorrence of Jews that he was completely indifferent to their fate once expelled from Britain:

At last this nation of scavengers, that only live on the misfortunes and divisions of others, will have all the time to cheat and rob and divide themselves amongst themselves in their own land. And, if by doing so, they exterminate each other from the face of the globe, we will not have any deep or lasting regret.⁷⁰

Finally, it was in recognition of the significance of his antisemitism that a copy of John Amery's booklet, *England and Europe*, was surreptitiously copied from the rare books section of London's Imperial War Museum and, in 1994, reprinted by *The Truth at Last*, an antisemitic newspaper based in the United States. The objective was to distribute *England and Europe* worldwide and so liberate Amery's antisemitism from the shadows. But why leave it to his prejudiced supporters to bring John Amery's poisonous views back to life? As we have seen, Amery was a committed and fanatical antisemite. So let it be us that turns the spotlight on Amery and the antisemitism of this 'perfect English gentleman'.

NIGEL COPSEY is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Teesside. He is the author of *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Palgrave 2000).

70 Amery, *England and Europe*, 31–2.